

Included, Educated & Cared For

“Our vision is that Somerset’s children and young people grow up in a safe, child friendly county that supports them to be happy, healthy and prepared for adulthood.”

June 2024 – Progress Report for Scrutiny



Somerset
Council

Somerset Council will build a fairer, greener, resilient, more flourishing Somerset that cares for the most vulnerable and listens to you.

Priority Workstreams

Local mainstream school is the right choice for most children

- Mainstream Plus
- Assessment post-5 including EHCPs
- Priority capital projects
- Supported internships
- EHCP communications and decision-making
- Funding and finance policy and strategy
- Attendance & preventing exclusion strategies

Families can access support early

- Best Start In Life
- Connect Somerset



Developing an excellent workforce for children

- Neighbourhood working
- Recruit and retain high quality staff
- Children's workforce training programme
- Education restructure - short term

Sufficient homes for children in care and school places for children with additional needs in Somerset

- Sufficiency strategy 0-25
- Fostering improvement
- 16+ Thrive - preventing homelessness accommodation
- Market shaping
- Homes and Horizons
- Children with disabilities resource transformation

Director's Progress Summary

- New Children's Transformation Board and Finance Board established giving greater clarity on pressures, successes and areas of concern.
- Majority of projects in each workstream underway, some are still being scoped.
- Financial pressures across the system – impacting on capacity and morale with differing levels of uncertainty as some teams are awaiting consultation processes.
- Largely positive sessions with headteachers to consider changes to banding and other measures to support inclusion in mainstream schools.
- Pilots to test Neighbourhood-based working are in development and offer an exciting and mutually supportive way forward.
- Some progress made in recruiting foster carers, but insufficiency of foster homes and delays to Homes and Horizons homes are impacting on our spend with external providers and putting savings at risk. As a result, some children are living in residential care, both in and out of county, when they need a local foster home.
- Rising numbers of children and young people coming into care are also increasing budget pressures, with the greatest vulnerabilities and costs in the 10 to 15 age group.

Children's Transformation Programme – Overarching Finance Summary

Overarching Status

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May/June 2024

Financial position is challenging given rising demand and significant budget pressure due to increasing external spend

Working Well

- Children’s Strategic Transformation Board and Children’s Finance Transformation Board now in place to provide overarching assurance and oversight
- Strengthened understanding of current financial position and trajectory
- School transport is over-delivering savings and cost avoidance
- Combined SEND sufficiency / commissioning work is enabling clearer understanding and planning

Challenges

- DSG: Costs increased but income reduced, combined with reducing birth rate, small schools and historic underfunding of SEND – is driving cost into Independent Non-Maintained School (INMS) provision
- National challenge of statutory override
- External placements budget – increased demand, particularly in relation to teenagers and serious youth violence

Escalations

- Risk to delivering savings:
- Construction delays for Homes and Horizons homes 6 to 8
 - Lack of move on social housing / private rent accommodation for Thrive 16+, is reducing savings possible through new contract

Children's Transformation Programme – MTFP Tracker

MTFP		24/25					
Ref		£	Over-achieved	Achieved	On Track	At Risk	Comments
CFE001	Home to school transport	324,500		149,000	175,500		Overachieved on savings/cost avoidance for 23/24. 86% of cost avoidance for 24/25 achieved
CFE003	Utilise more centrally retained Early Years funding & reduce use of external partners	398,100		398,100			Education savings achieved but likely budget overspend impacting on financial position
CFE005	Funding Virtual School via Pupil Premium Plus	410,000		410,000			
CFE006	Reduce 4 SEND officer posts	132,000		132,000			
CFE007	Educational Psychology Service budget reduction	141,000		141,000			
CFE008	Replace council funding for children at risk of NEET 16+ with external provider.	100,000		100,000			
CFE009	Using Council staff to draft all EHC assessments and plans, instead of using an external provider	125,000				125,000	Awaiting updated financial information
CFE010	Cease funding MOMO app	11,100		11,100			
CFE012	Cease out of hours security checks for 3 supported accommodation homes (18+)	35,000			35,000		Slight delay to contract termination, but minimal impact on target
CFE013	Apply for Adoption Support Fund for SGO support	30,000		30,000			
CFE015	Fostering placements – move 5 children from residential to fostering	67,000			67,000		Awaiting updated financial information. 2 children moved to Fostering to date
CFE016	16+ placements (Block contract)	3,385,800			1,482,000	1,903,800	Commissioning and finance review underway to re-project savings and put mitigations in place
CFE017	Homes and Horizons	1,714,900			1,714,900		
CFE018	16+ DPS (Spot purchase)	1,585,500				1,585,500	DPS now live, first contracts being prepared
CFE2324-05	Homes and Horizons additional - reduction in the cost of residential placements for children in care	1,109,000			692,000	417,000	Savings reduced due to delays in opening homes 6, 7 and 8, 1 pod and 2 annexes
	TOTALS	9,568,900		1,371,200	4,166,400	4,031,300	

Priority Workstream

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Local mainstream school is the right choice for most children

Summary Report

Working Well

- All scoping documents have been completed and this has thrown up important issues of understanding / coordination which we are now working through which will result in smoother delivery over time.
- Education budgets have now been finalised and we have moved into monitoring.
- New financial monitoring processes have been put in place to streamline weekly decision making and improve the quality of decision making. This is now secure for equipment spend and is improving for INMS and costed plans.
- Analysis on equalising banding has been completed and will be shared with schools for views about implementation on 11 June.
- MAT CEOs have agreed to discuss leading on attendance and exclusion at their annual planning meeting in June.
- We have closed 60 'hard cases' from the original list of 140 children.
- Educational Psychology have started triaging children and indicating what a suitable placement would entail: this has been a big step forward for SEND statutory teams. in reducing workload and making placement work more focused.
- Special schools have agreed to work collaboratively on improving the annual review process - a meeting to discuss shared priorities is on 11/6.
- Analysis has been completed of pupils in INMS and under assessment to understand the sufficiency gap. Planning work is underway to identify opportunities to expand existing provision quickly to address the September gap for places.

Not working well

- Alignment of corporate processes for service redesign with our work
- Communication with schools and parents around individual children is not progressing as quickly as other areas.
- Rising staff shortages in Statutory SEND team and in Vulnerable Learners - new approaches that will relieve pressures inbuilt into how these teams were designed are still some way off and that is creating pressures in the immediate term that will impact on managers' ability to drive change.

To Escalate

- N/A

Priority Workstream

Developing an excellent workforce for children

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Developing an excellent workforce for children

Working Well

Neighbourhood Working

- Neighbourhood working pilot in Wincanton and West Somerset is on track. Following learning from the pilots, the anticipated roll out for the wider Neighbourhood model is for consultation in Autumn 24 with implementation during early 2025
- Work underway to link FIS Practitioners with Champions to jointly work more closely with schools where exclusions are causing concern

Education Restructure

Early indication that costed model may generate savings. Corporate agreement that Consultation to commence in September

Not working well

Recruit & Retain High Quality Staff

- Insufficient social workers (estimated **42** Social Worker /Advanced Practitioner vacancies, likely to improve significantly in September to **9** dependent on turnover, international SWs and NQSWs starting in post).
- If establishment achieved, caseloads would be manageable. Average Social Worker caseload is 19.04
- Morale despite challenges is positive in some areas, but low in some teams – impacted by insufficient office space and opportunities to come together
- Lack of HR capacity is a concern

Workforce Training programme

This work to establish improved system-wide cultural induction and training opportunities is in development, but is not the highest priority area of work for this group who are initial focusing on sufficient staff and schools as the highest priority

To Escalate

- N/A

Priority Workstream

Families can access support early

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Families Can Access Support Early Priority Summary

Working Well

- JTAI visit was very positive about Connect Somerset including meetings with Champions and visiting Holyrood Academy community work
- Roll-out of Transform Family View on new Azure platform and training is progressing well – enabling more data sharing and insight. Majority of Social Work and FIS are using, School roll-out later in June.
- Agreed to expand Social Care case mgt system to external partners. PFSAs will be the first users, followed by schools and some VCFSE partners. Enables better processes, data sharing and quality assurance across early help system.
- NEETs risk model is nearly completed using new AI capability and improving identification. Hosted on Transform Family View and includes guidance to schools about what support to put in place for pupils.
- New group offer in 10 areas for post-natal parent support. Forest programme of more intensive support for parents now in Chard, Yeovil and Bridgwater. Antenatal education pilot on track including maternity, public health nursing, maternity voices. When joined up, these programmes create the basis of a distributed Family Hubs offer, although early days.

Not working well

- Gap in comms capacity impacting awareness, support and key initiatives such as #Help4All – mitigation through appointing programme capacity and refocusing the team to do it ourselves
- Public Health Nursing Forest programme dedicated funding is only for two years

To Escalate

- Lack of digital capacity to support Help to Help Yourself database of local resources and other foundations such as a CRM and refreshed Directory.

Priority Workstream

Sufficient homes for children in care and school places for children with additional needs in Somerset

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Sufficient homes for children in care and school places for children with additional needs in Somerset Priority Summary

Working Well

- Incremental improvements and testing new approaches, such as three additional move-on properties secured for 16+ Thrive and the Blue Elephant pilot to move children from residential to fostering
- Thrive 16+ support to young people, the contract, panels and development of the provider are progressing well
- Inflation negotiations achieved £1.4m savings compared to the submitted inflationary pressure, but we know providers will push this up over the year

Not working well

- Continued delays to Homes and Horizons annexes and pods due to ground conditions and planning requirements and third-party delays – pulling all possible leavers to deliver as soon as possible
- Full projected savings for Thrive 16+ unlikely to be achieved due to additional demand, lack of move-on accommodation and delays in moving young people such as because of their exams. Review is underway to report more fully and identify mitigations.
- Significant increase in demand, 608 children now in care, escalation in youth violence is a risk factor

To Escalate

- Lack of private rental & housing for Care Leavers
- Rising demand for Children Looked After
- Marketing support for Fostering